

# Sex scandals of female warriors

For YOU

WASHINGTON. — Sex-with-recruit scandals at military training facilities and the now abandoned court-martial trial of America's first female B-52 bomber pilot for adultery have sent newspaper headline writers into overtime and become the grist for talk-radio programmes around the United States.

Have America's uniformed services become a hotbed for illicit — and sometimes coerced — sex?

## Antiquated

Are authorities — overwhelmingly male — following antiquated guidelines that unrealistically try to regulate hormonal impulses?

Is there a double-standard applied when those rules are broken?

In fact, some are questioning the wisdom itself of a gender-segregated military and speculate a return to the more segregated model of the past may be wise.

"There is a lot of misconception out there about what the gender-segregated military was like," said Judith Youngman, a political science and public policy professor at the US Coast Guard Academy.

"Men and women did work together side by side. We also had problems back then — harassment was more blatant. I can attest, as can anyone who served back in that time, that things have got

By Richard Tomkins

dramatically better since the gender-integrated military.

"Harassment is not a new problem. These issues are not new at all," she said.

Latest Pentagon figures show about 60 percent of women in uniform have been sexually harassed by male colleagues in some way. Slightly less than one-third report having been fondled or pawed, while six percent have reported sexual assaults.

The most blatant cases to make the headlines recently have involved instructors having sexual relations with trainees under their command, either consensually or through intimidation by virtue of authority.

The sergeant-major of the US Army, the highest-ranking enlisted man in the military service, has even been caught up in the wave of scandals. He is under investigation for adultery, solicitation for adultery and improper sex with subordinates.

## Forbidden

Under military codes, sex between drill instructors and recruits is totally forbidden. Sex between military personnel of differing ranks can also be illegal, depending on the service and other circumstances.

Youngman, a member

of the Defence Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, said harassment figures were "awful", but she was disinclined to attribute it solely to gender integration.

"The numbers are awful and still too high, but they are still low," she said.

"Women are 14 percent of our active duty forces. As any one of these cases suggests, sex harassers appear to be multiple perpetrators. But even in the worst case, that every woman is harassed by a different soldier or sailor, that still means only 5 to 7 percent of soldiers and sailors are engaging in this behaviour."

## Tensions

Youngman attributes some of the incidences of sexual harassment to tensions brought on by an overworked military force, caused by downsizing and increased deployments, lack of clarity and consistency in enforcement of rules governing fraternisation between sexes.

She also says the military, unlike other employers, faces the monumental job in socialising newer service members — average age 18 to 19 years — to military rules on interpersonal relations which are often at odds with the more permissive civilian society.

"The military is a very different place from any civilian business or pri-



FIRST LIEUTENANT KELLY J. FLINN, America's first B-52 bomber pilot, leaves the legal building holding a bouquet of roses at Minot Air Force Base near Minot, North Dakota. She will be allowed to resign rather than face a court-martial on adultery and other charges.

vate-sector employer," she said. "The military is a very young group, and every year they are bringing in these large numbers of soldiers and sailors who have to be trained and educated on appropriate behaviour and relationships."

"To be honest, today compared to 20 years ago, 18 and 19-year-old recruits do not have the same respect for authority," which made adherence to the rules more problematic, Youngman said.

The days of separate military units for women in the armed forces ended nearly 20 years ago, and with it a steady erosion on

restrictions and ceilings on pay, promotions and military specialties, or jobs, open to women.

The result has been a steady increase in women joining the ranks, in which they serve with males in the same units and share facilities.

## Not surprised

"When you put men and women together in a confined environment and shake vigorously, don't be surprised if sex occurs," said Charles Moskos, a military sociologist at Northwestern University.

In fiscal 1996, roughly 14 percent of America's 1.45 million active duty

personnel were female. In 1973, when conscription ended and America adopted an all-volunteer force, women in the military services accounted for only 1.6 percent of more than 2 million troops, according to Defence Department figures.

As a percentage of recruits today, women account for about 20 percent of enlistees overall.

"Women join for the same reasons men do," Marine 2nd Lieutenant Courtney Wykoph said. "They're looking for adventure, challenge, pride, service, educational opportunities and job training."

Women in the US

armed services fly combat aircraft, serve on most combat ships, drive fuel tankers to forward armoured units and handle forward communications systems.

Women are barred from ground positions likely to result in brutal hand-to-hand fighting with the enemy.

In the Gulf War, some 40 000 women worked among the force of more than half-million male soldiers the United States sent to dislodge Iraq from Kuwait.

## Love boat

Complaints by women of sexual harassment were relatively low, officials said. But a navy supply ship in the Gulf had to send 33 females home — their pregnancies earned the vessel the nickname "the love boat".

"You can't eliminate all hormones by fiat, but you can insist that in a professional environment people behave professionally," said Congresswoman Jane Harmon.

Military authorities have appointed a special panel to review rules and regulations governing sexual fraternisation in the military. Although there are strong pressures for rules to be relaxed to reflect civilian society, Mr Moskos, Youngman and others do not expect major changes.

Greater clarity, consistency and enforcement, they said, was viewed by the military as preferable to allowing more lax, civilian standards to infect a closed society in which discipline is paramount. — Sapa-DPA.